

THE BRITISH MUSEUM LIBRARY

WHAT sort of reference library can be provided in connection with the natural history collections when they are moved from the British Museum to South Kensington? is a subject now under consideration. It is stated on good authority that, so far as the building arrangements at Kensington go, no provision whatever has been made for library space, and that in the Act passed at the end of last session to enable the trustees to move the collections, a reference library seems to have been entirely overlooked. That Act has, however, been the subject of a resolution by the General Committee of the British Association, requesting the Council to take such steps in the matter as they might deem expedient; and although the resolution had principal reference to the administration of the collections, its force extends equally to such an important matter as a library, should the Council "deem it expedient" to include that subject.

Whatever may be the decision as to what part of the library can be transferred to Kensington, or what ought to be transferred, it is only the works relating to biological studies that will be essential there, and it is only these, therefore, that are likely to be the subject of inquiry. But it might, perhaps, lead to changes of great value to those who use the British Museum Library for the purposes of referring to the literature of science in its other branches as well, if the inquiry could be extended to include the question of the actual state of this literature, which is available for use at the Museum. Whether it should be expected that the national library should contain as complete a collection as possible of scientific publications, or whether those who wish to consult them ought to belong to several of the incorporated learned societies, and use their libraries, is a separate question. When this question is considered, if it has to be considered at all, it must not be forgotten that no one society has anything like a comprehensive collection of scientific works, each society aiming at completeness in its own subjects; that to belong to several societies is not within the means of every student; and that, as one of the advantages of these societies is that members may take books away, no one can be sure of finding on the shelves what they may wish to consult.

But quite apart from such a question as this it would be of great use, with a prospect of effecting changes, to know what is the actual state of the British Museum library as regards scientific literature.

Only those who have had occasion to work at the library can have any idea how incomplete it is in this department, or what a wearisome toil it is, in consequence of the system of cataloguing adopted, to find whether a work they wish to consult is or is not there. If the experiences of those who have had occasion to use the library for such purposes could be collected, the probability is that it would be found that from a third to a half of the works asked for were not obtainable there. This may seem at first sight a very surprising assertion to make, but there is good reason to believe it true. What the Museum does or does not contain can, however, be known only by an inquiry, especially directed to ascertain the facts. A reference to the catalogue, as at present arranged, is quite inadequate to give an answer. The officials themselves could not tell from it what they have and what they have not. For example: suppose a particular volume of the Reports of the United States Geological Survey of the Territories is wanted, a reference to the catalogue will not tell whether it has been received or not. The catalogue simply gives the information that the series is on a particular shelf. If a ticket for the whole series is filled up according to the requirements of the reading-room regulations with the press mark, the title, and Washington, 1873, &c., 4° added, then it will be found when the books are brought

to the reader's seat, that only volumes two, six, nine, and ten of the whole series are there. This illustration applies to all publications which are issued in a series either by societies or by government departments. To ascertain, therefore, what is the incompleteness of series of which some numbers find a place in the catalogue, it would be requisite, if a reader undertook such an investigation, to write tickets for every series separately, to have all the numbers brought, and then to make note of the gaps. Such a work is rather the duty of the officials than of readers, but, as already stated, it would require a special inquiry, whether made by readers or by officials, to ascertain what is really the state of the British Museum library as to the literature of science.

It must be borne in mind that an important part, perhaps the most important part, of the literature to which a worker in science wants to refer, is that which is in the series of the different societies and government departments, and it is just in this that the British Museum is weakest, and in which it might be supposed a remedy might be most easily found. To fill up gaps of old standard works out of print is not very easy. Chances of sales of libraries must be carefully looked out for to effect this, but the current literature of societies and of departments is more easily secured.

An inquiry into the state of the scientific literature at the Museum, and the facilities for its use, might be advantageously directed under three distinct heads, each of which has an important bearing on meeting the requirements of those who wish to consult the collection:—

1. As to the incompleteness of series.
2. As to the length of time that elapses between the publication of a number and its being obtainable at the Museum.
3. As to the method of cataloguing.

As regards (1) incompleteness of series, there is no reason to believe that it is confined to publications referring to any particular branches of science more than others. For example, to take a few cases at random, there are only three volumes of the reports of the state of the Brussels Observatory; there is only one part of the long series of reports on the health of the City of London; there are three volumes wanting of the Report of the Commissioners on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain; the publications of the Geological Survey are very incomplete; there are none of the maps of the Water Supply Commission nor of the Coal Commission; and so on. To attempt to give a list of what is known to be wanting would not be of much use for the reason stated above, that nothing short of a full inquiry into the matter could make known what is the real state of affairs. When a question is asked as to why certain volumes are missing, there is always one reply given—the publications of societies, home and foreign, are presented, and cannot be demanded, and as to the publications of Government departments, the Museum has no claim. If they happen to be sent to the Museum they are received, but if not, it would seem that under the existing system there is no help for it.

As regards (2) the length of time before a volume that is sent can be had for reference, it may be safely put at from one to two years. If a question is asked, how it is that such delays occur, a very general answer is that some societies are very irregular in sending their publications, but when such cases as this occur—that at the Museum a reader cannot now have a volume of the *Bulletin* of the Brussels Academy later than 1876, while at another public museum, the Patent Office Library in Southampton Buildings, he can have it up to June in this year—it seems to point rather to some feature in the administration of the Museum as the cause. Many cases of this kind might be quoted if it were required to establish the fact. It is, no doubt, a wise arrangement that novels and magazines that can be seen at any circulating

library should not be available for use at the Museum till a year after publication. But the case is very different with the class of scientific publications now referred to. Of the foreign and colonial publications not many copies of each issue reach this country, and in some cases they can be seen only by the courtesy of an officer of a society that has received a copy. Then, again, not only the amount of interest taken in any particular communication, but sometimes its value, is changed in twelve months. It has been already said that perhaps the question may be raised whether the British Museum is the place to expect to see recent scientific publications, but it would be well if its present state were in any case known.

Then (3) as to the method of cataloguing. The use of the catalogue is of course to enable a reader to find the press mark of the books he wants with the least possible delay. There may be differences of opinion as to the extent to which a catalogue should help a reader, but the facts as regards the British Museum are these. Scientific publications which are not books, magazines, or newspapers, are for the most part grouped under "Academies." The majority of those which do not fall under this head are to be found under the titles of the government departments by which they are issued. In order not to waste time over the catalogue the reader must know certain particulars about the work he wants. If it is issued by a British government department he must know whether it has or not been presented to Parliament. For example, the pathological researches of Dr. Sanderson and Dr. Klein were addressed, through the Local Government Board, to the Lords of the Privy Council; the geological work of the Survey is through the Science and Art Department of the Committee of Council on Education, also under the Privy Council. The pathological researches are, however, presented to Parliament, and the volume containing any particular part of them must be, therefore, looked for under "Parliamentary Papers," while the geological work is not presented to Parliament, and must therefore be looked for under "Great Britain and Ireland—Geological Surveys." In the former case it is requisite to know beforehand in what year the papers were included; in the latter case the memoir to a map may be obtained in this way, but no clue is given as to how to obtain the map itself. (If the press mark for the map is searched for in the map catalogue, cross-references lead to "World—miscellaneous—see geographical and geological"). The difficulty of knowing whether a work has or has not been presented to Parliament is sometimes great. For example, some of Mr. Simon's Cholera Reports are included under the Registrar-General's returns and are therefore to be looked for among "Parliamentary Papers;" while the celebrated 1848 Report, which seems somehow not to have been presented, has to be found in the general catalogue under the name Simon, John. This is, of course, quite consistent with the method adopted. As it is with the British so with the foreign publications of departments, it is requisite to know to what department a report is sent. An entomologist may be surprised that to get at some of the United States' publications giving monographs on certain groups, he has to get his press-mark from the catalogue under United States—Department of the Interior—Geological Surveys of the Territories—yet such is the case. And this, too, is quite consistent with the method of cataloguing adopted.

If the work to be consulted is issued by a learned society it will probably be found entered under "Academies." In order to find it in the catalogue the exact title must be known. For example, it is no use to look for a Society of Arts' publication under "Society of Arts." it is requisite to go in the catalogue from "of" to "for" as the full title is "Society for the Promotion," &c. It is also essential to know whether a society has the prefix

kaiserliche or kaiserliche-königliche, or königliche, or Imperiale, or Royal, or British, or the title of any nationality or town. It is also requisite to know where the work is published, as the grouping is according to the plan, Academies at so and so. That a reader should first have all this information about a work he wants to consult may be very reasonable, for perhaps the collection at the Museum is too extensive to admit of printing, as the Patent Office library does, a compact and convenient "list of the scientific and other periodicals and transactions of learned societies in the free library."

But it is after a reader has found in the catalogue the title of the society that his real trouble begins. It might reasonably be supposed that the first entry under the name of the society would be the memoirs, transactions, or journal, as the case may be, of the society. That is not the British Museum plan. First are given the press marks of charter, laws, bye-laws, notices of annual meetings, lists of members, and such like things, and page after page has to be turned over to get to the publications of the society. If there are two sets of publications, such as quarto transactions and an octavo journal, these are generally separated by some pages of other references. To take a very familiar case, the memoirs of the French Académie are of course frequently referred to. After the reader has found the right volume of the catalogue containing "Academies at Paris," and has found Académie des Sciences, he will have to look on one page for vols. i. to xi., then, eight pages further on, for vols. xii. to xxiv., and then, further on again, xxv. onwards. It is difficult to imagine what principle is supposed to be followed, or what is gained to a reader by such a plan. If it should happen that the reader does not know that one series of the memoirs contains the communications of members and another series the communications of "Savans Étrangers," he will still have more trouble in obtaining what he wants. Or take an English case. Suppose a reader wishes to refer to an account of a paper communicated to the Ashmolean Society. He will find, under that heading, entries of an account of the Society, old notices of meetings to be held (handbills), rules, &c., but no intimation of whether the Society issues any transactions.

In short, with all the societies, the entries of the regular publications are so mixed up with rules, list of members, bye-laws, &c., that it takes some time, after the right volume and right page have been found, to turn out their press mark. Again, it is not always easy for a reader to know what is classed as an academy and what is not. An account of a communication given before the Royal Institution in Albemarle Street must be sought in the journal catalogued under academies, while one given before the London Institution in Finsbury Circus, though equally a chartered society, must be sought under "London." Or again, how should the records of observations be catalogued? under periodical publications? under academies, or in the general catalogue. The practice differs in different cases.

Were it not for the kind and ready assistance given in cases of need by the reading-room superintendent and his assistants, a reader would be often quite unable to see what he needs.

THE "GRAHAM" LECTURE AND MEDAL

SOME time ago the Chemical Section of the Philosophical Society of Glasgow had under consideration the propriety of raising a fund for the encouragement of original research. The movement soon began to assume practical shape, and in course of time the fund was found to have reached to nearly 300*l.*, the subscribers being chiefly well-known chemical manufacturers and merchants in Glasgow and the west of Scotland. For a time there was